

## No. 5 Twenty Degrees.

A hot and sultry day toward the end of June was drawing to a close. I had just finished dinner and returned to my laboratory to continue some spectroscopic work, when Dufuray, whom I had not seen for more than a week, walked in. Noticing that I was busy, he took a cigar from a box which lay on the table and sank into an easy chair without speaking.

"What is it tonight, Norman?" he asked at last, as I descended from my stool. "Is it the Elxir of Life or the Philosopher's Stone?"

"Neither," I replied. "I have received some interesting specimens of reduced haemoglobin, and am experimenting on them. By the way, where have you been all this week?"

"At Eastbourne. The Assizes begin at the Old Bailey, as you know, on Thursday, and I am conducting the defense in the case of the Disbury murder."

"However, I have not come here to talk shop. I had a small adventure at Eastbourne, and have come to tell you about it."

"More developments?" I asked, slightly startled by his tone, which was unusually grave. "Come into the garden; we will have coffee there."

We went through the open French windows and ensconced ourselves in wicker chairs.

"Does it ever occur to you," said Dufuray, taking his cigar from his mouth as he spoke, "that you and I are in personal danger?"

"I interrupted him by saying that such things do not happen in our day, but my only surprise is that Mme. Koluchy has not yet struck a blow at either of us. The thought of her haunts me; she fights with almost omnipotent powers, and we cannot foresee from what quarter the shaft may come."

"You have a reason for saying this?" I interrupted. "Has it anything to do with your visit to the seaside?"

"There is a possibility that it may have something to do with it, but of that I am not certain. In all likelihood, Head, there are no two men in London in such a strange position as ours."

"It is a self-elected one, at any rate," I replied.

"True," he answered. "Well, I will tell you what happened, and the further sequel which occurred this evening. I had been feeling rather down, and as I had a few days to spare, thought I would spend them geologizing along the cliffs at Eastbourne. On Tuesday last I went out for the whole day on a long expedition under the cliffs toward Buring Gap. I was so engrossed in my discovery of some very curious fossils, that I did not notice which part of the coast is noted, that I forgot the time, and darkness set in before I turned for home. The tide was luckily low, so I had nothing to fear. I had just reached the point on which the lighthouse stands when, to my amazement, I heard a shrill, clear voice call my name. I stopped and turned round, but at first could see nothing. In a moment, however, I observed a figure approaching me—it sprang lightly from rock to rock. As it came nearer it resolved itself into a boy, dressed in a light gray suit and a cloth cap. I was just going to address him when he raised his hand as if in warning, and said quickly, in a low voice: 'Don't return to London—stay here—you are in danger. What do you mean?' I asked. He made no reply, and before I could repeat my question had left me, and was continuing his rapid course toward the promontory. I shouted after him. 'Stop! who are you?' but in another moment I completely lost sight of him in the dark shadow of the cliffs. I ran forward, but not a trace of him could I see. I shouted; there was no answer. I then made up my mind that pursuit was useless, and returned to the town."

"Have you seen or heard anything since of the mysterious youth?" I asked.

"Nothing whatever. What do you think of his warning? Is it possible that I am really in danger?" I asked. Mme. Koluchy mixed up in this affair?"

I paused before replying, then I said slowly:

"As madame is in existence, and as the youth, whoever he was, happened to know your name, there is just a possibility that the adventure may wear an ugly aspect. Two conclusions may be arrived at: either it is a warning, that this warning was intended to keep you at Eastbourne for some dangerous object; the other, that it was a friendly warning given for some reason in this strange man's mind."

"You arrive precisely at my own views on the subject," replied Dufuray. "I am not a nervous man, and can defend my life if necessary. But that small incident has struck to me in a curious way. Of course it is quite impossible for me to leave town. The Disbury murder trial comes on this week and as there are many complications it will occupy some days; but, Head, try as I will, the impression is that the boy's warning will not wear off, and now, listen, there is a sequel. See; this came by the last post."

As Dufuray spoke he drew a letter from his pocket and thrust it into my hands.

I took it to the window, where, by the light of a lamp inside the room, I read the following lines:

"Meet me inside gates, Marble arch, at 10 tonight. Do not fail. You will be able to do something."

"Your correspondent makes a strange rendezvous," I remarked, as I handed it back to him. "What do you mean to do?"

"What would you do in my place?" asked Dufuray, shifting the question. He gazed at me earnestly, and with veiled anxiety in his face.

"Take no notice," I said. "The letter is anonymous, and as likely as not may be a trap to lead you into danger. I do not see anything for it but for you to pursue the even tenor of your way, just as if there were no Mme. Koluchy in the world."

"It was half-past 9 o'clock, the moon was rising, and Dufuray's grave face, with his dark brows knit, confronted mine. After a time he rose."

"I believe you are right," he said. "I shall disregard that letter as I disregard the warnings of the youth. My unknown correspondent must keep his rendezvous in vain. I won't stay any longer this evening. I am terribly busy getting up my case for Thursday. Good-night."

When he was gone I sat out of doors a little longer, pondering much over the two warnings which he had received, and which I had thought best to make little of to him. It was, as he said, impossible for him to leave town, but all the same I by no means liked the aspect of affairs. Whatever the warnings meant, they were at least significant of grave danger ahead, and knowing Mme. Koluchy as I did, I felt certain that no depths of treachery were beyond her powers."

I returned to the house, but felt little inclination to resume my experiments in the laboratory. The night grew more and more sultry, and a thunderstorm threatened."

Between 11 and 12 o'clock I was just preparing to retire for the night, when there came a loud ring at my front door. The servants had all gone to bed. In some surprise I went to open the door. A woman in a voluminous cloak and old-fashioned bonnet was standing on the threshold. The moment the door was opened and before I could say a word, she had stepped into the hall."

"Don't keep me out," she said, in a breathless voice. "I am followed, and there is danger. Mr. Dufuray has failed to keep his appointment, and I was forced to come here to know you. Mr. Head, I know all about you, and also about Mr. Dufuray. Let me speak at once. I have something most important to say. Do get over your astonishment, and close the door. I tell you I am closely watched."

The figure of the woman was old, but the voice was young. Without a word I shut the hall door. As I did so she moved her bonnet and dropped her cloak. She now stood revealed to me as a slight, handsome, dark-eyed girl. Her skin was of a clear olive, and her eyes black."

"My name is Elsie Fancourt," she said. "My home is at Henley. My mother is the widow of a barrister. Our address is 5 Gloucester Gardens, Albert Road, Henley. Will you remember it?"

"Will you make a note of it?" I asked.

"I can remember it without that," I said.

"Very good. Now, Mr. Head, you are a thinking strange thing of me, but I am not, in the ordinary sense of the word, an adventuress. I am a lady—one in sore, sore straits. I have come to you in my desperate need, because I believe you and also Mr. Dufuray are in the gravest danger. Will you trust me?"

As she spoke she raised her eyes and looked me full in the face. I read an expression of truth in the depths of her fine eyes. My suspicion vanished; I held out my hand.

"You are a strange girl, and have come here at a strange hour," I said. "Do not trust me. Only extreme circumstances could make you act as you are doing. What is the matter?"

"Take me into one of your sitting rooms, and I will explain."

I opened the door of my study and asked her to walk in.

"The matter is one of life and death," she began. "Mr. Dufuray has twice disregarded my warning. I warned him at the risk of my liberty, if not my life, and when he failed to keep the appointment which I made for him this evening, I felt there was nothing whatever for it but to come to you and to cast myself on your mercy. Mr. Head, this is not a moment to lose. Our common enemy—here she lowered her voice—"is Mrs. Koluchy. She has done me a great and awful wrong. I will avenge myself on her or die."

"Is it possible that you are the person who gave Mr. Dufuray that strange warning on the beach at Eastbourne?" I asked.

"I am. I dressed myself as a boy for greater safety, but that night I was following him when he raised his hand as if in warning, and said quickly, in a low voice: 'Don't return to London—stay here—you are in danger. What do you mean?' I asked. He made no reply, and before I could repeat my question had left me, and was continuing his rapid course toward the promontory. I shouted after him. 'Stop! who are you?' but in another moment I completely lost sight of him in the dark shadow of the cliffs. I ran forward, but not a trace of him could I see. I shouted; there was no answer. I then made up my mind that pursuit was useless, and returned to the town."

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the purpose. Do you mind assuming this role for me?"

"I am perfectly willing to try my hand on your piano," I said.

"Thank you. Then, in case you have to write that letter, come to my house tomorrow about 2 o'clock. The servant will admit me, believing you to be the tuner, and will show you into the drawing room—I will join you there in a few moments. You can leave the rest to me."

"I am sorry," she said, speaking in a rather loud voice. "But mother has a very bad headache and asked me to request you to postpone tuning the instrument today; but you must not go before you have had some lunch. I have asked the servant to bring it in."

She had left the door open, and now the girl who had admitted me followed, bearing a tray which contained some light refreshment.

"Put it down on that table, Susan," said Miss Fancourt, "and then please go at once for the medicine for your mistress. I can open the door in case any one calls."

"Please let me continue," said the girl; and Miss Fancourt and I found ourselves alone.

"Susan will be absent for over half an hour," said the girl, "and I have told mother enough to insure her not coming into the room. She has feigned that headache; it was necessary to do so in order to get an excuse for sending our little servant out for some medicine, and so keeping her out of the way. As she was here questioning me only this morning. Oh, you make a first-class piano tuner, Mr. Head, looking at me with a smile, which vanished almost as soon as it came. 'But refuse to leave town.'"

"He does," I replied. "I told you that it was quite impossible for him to do so."

"I know you said so. Now I am going to give you full confidence; but before I do so will you give me your word that what I am about to say will never, under any circumstances, pass your lips?"

"I will do that," I replied. "But if I find that you are a friend to me, I will be one to you."

She looked at me steadily.

"That will not do," she said. "Mr. Dufuray is an old acquaintance of yours, is he not?"

"My greatest friend," I said.

His brow cleared and her dark eyes lightened.

"His life is in danger," she said. "By this time tomorrow he may be dead. He is trembling, her very lips turned white."

"For heaven's sake, speak out," I cried.

"Yes, I will explain myself. I am certain that when you know all you will give the promise which is absolutely necessary for my own salvation and the salvation of one dearer to me than myself. Six months ago I became engaged to a man of the name of John North."

"North?" I said. "North," I felt puzzled by the memory.

The girl proceeded without noticing my interruption.

"I love John North," she said slowly. "If necessary, I would die for him. I would go to any risk to save him from his present perilous position."

As she spoke her dark brows were knit, she clasped her hands tightly together, and bent her head.

"There is a managing clerk of the name of North in Dufuray's office," I said, slowly.

"There is," she replied. "He is the man about whom I am speaking. Now please follow me closely. Mr. North, who was educated abroad and spent all his early years in Italy, was arrested when still quite a youth to a large firm of solicitors in the city. Early in the spring Mr. Dufuray engaged him as one of his managing clerks at a salary of four guineas a week."

"I met North last night," I said. "He looked an intelligent fellow, and my friend spoke very highly of him. I have not the least idea, Miss Fancourt, what this is leading up to, but, as far as I can tell, North seems all right."

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